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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine the needs of adults who had decided to return to school for higher education, the basic hypothesis being that their needs (which are different from those of younger students) are not being met. A questionnaire was sent to more than 1,100 men and women over 26 years of age who were attempting to complete an undergraduate degree. Of the 1,100, 494 were studied intensively. A list, including age, race, marital status, satisfaction with life, satisfaction with job, gives the basic information received from the return of the questionnaire. Needs listed include: (1) special academic advisement and counseling; (2) an adult center; (3) scholarships and financial aids; (4) the opportunity for a testing program; (5) special housing provisions; (6) special orientation programs; (7) improved enrollment and registration procedures; (8) more night class offerings; and (9) changes in curriculum, required courses, grading and evaluation. (KJ)

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Counseling Needs of Adult Students

PART I - INTRODUCTION

As we enter the decade of the 70's, change is predicted on every front. Nowhere, perhaps, will be seen greater change than in higher education. We are turning toward a more open admissions policy, toward a concept of education as an agent of change in an individual's life and as a contribution to his personal development. No longer are we sure which man or woman can profit most from higher education.

Dr. Kingman Brewster of Yale speaking at the fall commencement at Michigan State University said: "Higher learning cannot work if it is involuntary.... The dreadful word, 'drop-out'...has been allowed to frustrate sensible plans for splicing academic and non-academic experience.... It is the excessive lock-step, continuity of learning, from age 5 to 25, which stultified the motivation of some of the most gifted students. Easier escape and easier re-entry would do much to make the campus a voluntary community once again.... A person should not be made to feel that he must get all his formal education in the first 20-odd years of his life. Nor should he be made to feel that once he picks a line of work he has forever forfeited a chance to change his mind and tool up for some other career. There must be more chance to recycle back through the university if we are to retain the sense of continuous freedom of career choice."

Many educators begin now to talk of a "second chance" for adults, or to have an understanding of the adult attitude which says, "I'd rather switch than itch."

Question No. 14 on the MSU readmission application asks, "What plans have you made since you last enrolled that cause you to believe you can now achieve your academic objective?" One recent answer by an almost-thirty males was: "I'm getting too damned old to fool around."

The need for continuous education for adults is accelerating. We should be prepared to provide the help which adults need.

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PART II - SETTING

I come from a campus which has witnessed the development of a number of Advisement Centers in various colleges. These differ from our Counseling Center which is more concerned with psychological and psychiatric counseling.

In the Advisement Centers in the various colleges are: an Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, full-time professionals, and a number of women with masters or bachelors degrees who are employed half-time.

Working in this setting, I soon discovered that adults who were coming or returning to the University had needs which were not being met. Therefore, a study was undertaken and the results were summarized in 1968. A questionnaire was developed and eventually sent to more than 1100 men and women who were 26 years of age or older and who were attempting to get an undergraduate degree. A time lag of almost two terms developed in the study when it became evident that in spite of an extensive computerized record system, there had not previously been an attempt to identify students according to age. Eventually hundreds of cards had to be individually checked by hand through a number of offices in order to assure a nearly accurate list. Because foreign students were extensively studied elsewhere and because a home address for them was difficult to find, these students were not included in the study.

PART III - SUMMARY OF STUDY

Over 1100 were identified as 26 years of age or over who were <u>undergraduates</u>:

Sex	More males	61% were males 39% females
	Of the final 494 studied intensively	51% were males 49% females
Age	Males younger	87% of males were 37 or less 60% of females were 37 or less (therefore about 40% of females were 38 or more indicating mature women re-entering education)
Color	96% white	
Marital Status	76% married 24% males were single 9% females were single (largely widowed or divorced)	
Non-urban	70% born in population areas under 150,000	
Satisfaction with life	79% were very or moderately satisfied with their lives (females slightly more than males) Only 3½% were quite dissatisfied	
Satisfaction with job	74% were very or moderately satisfied with their jobs (11% of males dissatisfied to 4% of females)	

Many other characteristics were studied. I will mention only a few:

Full-Time	54% full-time (more females were full-time)	
Part-Time	68% of males 32% of females	
Curricular Choice	Males 78% enrolled in: social science business agriculture engineering education (10%)	Females 86% Enrolled in: education (41%) arts and letters no preference social science home economics
Reasons for not going on to college from high school (similar reasons for dropping out of college)	financial problem military service tired of going to school school not interesting lack of confidence desire to be married grades not good (emotional problem and unhappiness added for college drop-outs)	

Reasons for return	get a degree (all wanted this) improve income potential (males mentioned utilitarian reasons in second place) intellectual stimulation (females mentioned intellectual reasons in second place) continue interrupted college career prepare for a job advancement on the job supplement family income become more socially useful
Courses on campus	85.22% preferred
Improvement and referesher courses desired	
Course times	regular day night long sessions once weekly summer 1 x weekly and independent study
Lecture and discussion preferred	
Exams	frequent multiple answer 64% by males essay 55% by females
Degrees desired	47% bachelors 39% masters 7% doctorates (10% of males; 3% of females)
Working	54% of adults (plus going to the University)

In order of mention, here are the needs these students indicated on a check list:

1.	Special academic advisement and counseling (great need before coming or returning and a continuing need)	56%+
2.	A recognized adult center or "home"	46%
3.	Scholarships and financial aids	45%
4.	Advisement, and possibly registration by telephone	30%
5.	Special assistance in procedures	22%
6.	More information available in the catalog and schedule book	17% and 10%
7.	Opportunity for a testing program	17%

In 255 open-ended responses the following needs were indicated. These have been grouped in 10 categories (not according to frequency of mention).

1. Special academic advisement and counseling needs were spelled out. These includ
   (1) improved adult counseling service for all part-time students-day and evening
   (2) Assistance on <u>how</u> to come or return to the University
   (3) Aptitude tests and interest tests
   (4) A special designated program coordinator to handle all details for mature students
   (5) Help in scheduling classes for the working student
   (6) Help in planning a degree program (Very difficult or impossible to get a degree with present night course offerings)
   (7) Help in learning how to study
   (8) An individual check on progress of students who have problems
2. Special housing needs (not with 18 and 19 year olds)
3. A special orientation program for adults
4. Improved enrollment and registration procedures
5. Improved night course offerings: number of courses, several classes same night, reserved class space for night-time students, night courses in summer, <u>advisers</u> <u>or</u> <u>counselors</u> <u>available</u> <u>at</u> <u>night</u>.
6. Academic and curricular improvement for adults: flexibility, refresher courses, improved instructor attitude to mature students, more independent study, methods and requirements adjusted to adult needs, incorporate practical work and experience into program.
7. Adjustment of basic or required courses to individual needs
8. Changes in evaluation and grading
9. Increased financial aids to part-time students
10. Special adult facilities: physical, social, library, language labs at night, bus service, parking, nursery

PART IV - SOME IMPLICATIONS

What is the role of an adviser or a counselor? Is there a difference? No doubt each person's conception differs according to his background. At MSU graduate students in Student Personnel Work may take a Practicum in our Advisement Office. One of the students drew this conclusion: "the adviser in an advisement center can help the student to explore himself and his world and can take administrative action; the counselor may not have the same administrative authority to act." By whatever name, certainly the counselor needs to know the institution, its personnel, policies and procedures. Help is important at the quasi-administrative and personal and psychological levels. Berniece Neugarten in The Adult Years says: "In a sense the counselor-of-adults will be dealing with certain psychological issues in all adult age groups; the individual's use of experience; his structuring of the social world in which he lives; his perspectives of time; the ways in which he deals with the major life themes of work, love, time, and death; the changes in self-concept and changes in identity as individuals face the successive contingencies of marriage, parenthood, career advancement and decline, retirement, widowhood, and illness."

In our experience the adviser or counselor of adults cannot separate the academic from the personal. He deals with:

fears
- of inadequacy
- of examinations
- of inability to study and read rapidly
- of class discussion
- of being out-of-date
- of competition from adolescents
- of failure

individual reactions to stress, including such problems as priorities and time budgeting

self-analysis, search for identity, and role problems (these occur especially among mature women re-entering the academic or vocational world).

goals, educational and vocational planning

financial aids

personal adjustment problems

social problems

employment assistance

Students are sent to many other agencies on campus for additional help.

There is some indication that mature men and women respond better to mature counselors. Also, it is recognized that adults do come for more education voluntarily, with high motivation, a body of experience, a desire for immediate use of the learning, and perhaps a better basis for decision-making.

There is also evidence that counselors should extend their influence and make suggestions to faculty, administration, and other students in matters pertaining to the mature student.

One adult wrote:

"The need for additional course availability for adults who have the guts (excuse me, intestinal fortitude) to come back to school is great. It is,indeed, difficult to have spent a quarter century working and then finding that with new technological advances, etc., one is not worth in dollars and cents what a youngster is, fresh from college.

"So, one can either lie down and say "to hell with it" or get on the jolly old bandwagon and play the same tune. And that's where the trouble begins. And now, for my positive suggestion - I think that a greater variety of classes should be scheduled at night and/or on Saturdays in all fields. When a course is given once a year (winter, spring, summer or fall term) the availability of time and money have a tendency to occur at different times than when the course is given. Secondly, most degree programs require 12 credits, at least, of a foreign language. Try to get that in at night at Michigan State. There should be a reasonable amount of flexibility in requirements. I know there is some, but have you ever tried to track down counselors, teachers, etc. after working an eight hour day. Night-class instructors offer day-time office hours or say "see me at the break." Last term my class had about 400+ students, many of them middle-aged sourpusses like myself, and, let me tell you, that although the instructor spread himself to the zenith, there just wasn't enough of him to go around."

Here in this student's brief paragraph are presented a few problems on which a counselor may spend some time.